



The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

Ver Valley and Bricket Wood

This walk is a linear route linking stations on the Abbey railway line between Watford and St Albans, following the River Ver Trail. Much of the route runs close to the River Ver chalk stream, passing numerous historic features including water mills. See routemap on page 2.

The entire route to Bricket Wood railway station from St Albans is just under 7 miles. There is an option for a shorter walk of about 3 miles finishing at either Park Street railway station or How Wood railway station. Trains run regularly on the Abbey line between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey railway station.

Distance: 6.9 miles / 11.1 km

Ascent: 170 feet / 52 metres

Duration: 3 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Start: St Albans Abbey railway station

Finish: Bricket Wood railway station (or for a shorter walk, finish at either Park Street station or How Wood station)

Refreshments: several options in Park Street and Bricket Wood

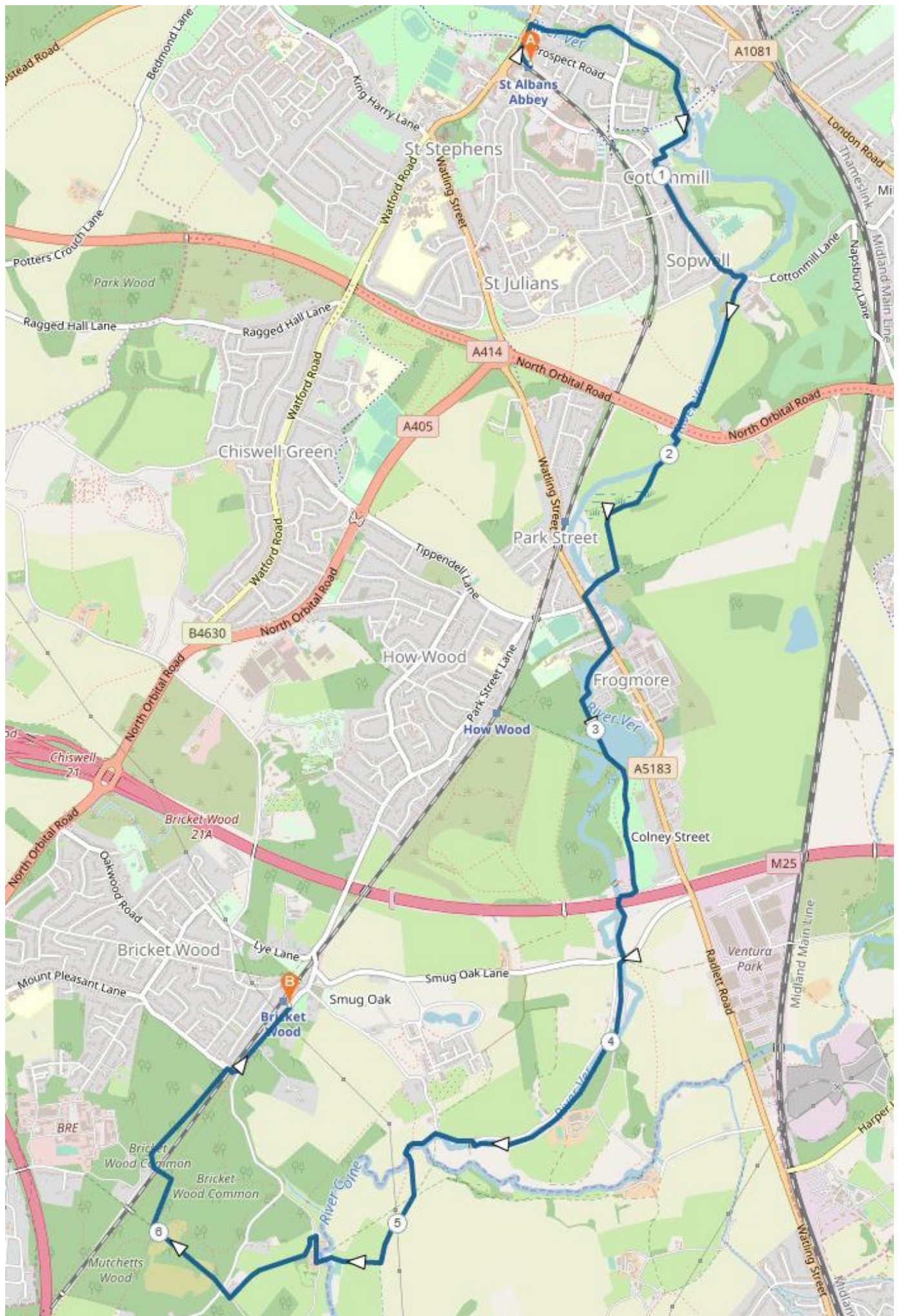
From St Albans Abbey station walk the short distance to the main road, then turn right to reach the bridge over the River Ver at the foot of Holywell Hill (there was once a well here used by the monks of St Albans Abbey). You will see the Cathedral on the hillside opposite.

You will be following the River Ver Trail for most of this route, marked by distinctive roundels.

Just before the river turn right onto the River Ver Trail. You immediately enter a quieter green space despite being only a short distance from the city centre.

Continue alongside the river, cross the footbridge and follow the path.





You will soon reach Cottonmill Bridge on Cottonmill Lane, where one of the many watermills which once operated on the river Ver produced cotton goods in the 19th century.

Cross the road and continue along the path to the right of the river.



The route here runs through the Sopwell Nunnery green space, with the river to the left flowing between fringing trees and vegetation. A nunnery was founded here in around 1140. The ruins on the site today are a short distance to the right of the path.

Continue along the River Ver Trail which in places runs along a boardwalk through wet riverside woodland.



The path runs under the bridge built to carry the railway from St Albans to Hatfield which opened in 1865 and closed to passenger traffic in 1951. The route of the disused line is now the Alban Way for walkers and cyclists.



On the next section of the route the River Ver Trail fingerposts help with route finding.



Beyond the bridge go straight ahead across the grassy space, with a view through the trees to another former watermill, Sopwell Mill, which at different times in its history produced flour, silk and paper.

Follow the mown grass around to the left, continue through the gap in the hedge, then turn left just beyond the children's playground ahead, to reach a lane. Turn right onto the lane, then left when you reach the residential road ahead (Cottonmill Lane).



A short detour along the side road called 'Old Oak' brings you to a recreation ground: here the river Ver curves round a promontory of higher ground, with views of St Albans Cathedral



Continue along Cottonmill Lane to the bottom of the hill, then turn left and walk around the corner towards New Barnes Mill and Sopwell Bridge.

The mill occupies an ancient mill site, and continued to grind corn until the Second World War. Cross the second bridge (over the millstream) and turn right onto the River Ver Trail.



Continue on the path alongside the river.

The riverside meadows on both sides of the A414 road are a county wildlife site, designated due to the plants of damp grassland found here.



Keep near the river to reach the footbridge. Cross to the other bank, then turn left to go under the A414 road.

Once under the A414, bear left over the bridge, go through the kissing gate, then turn right to keep close to the left-hand side of the river. Look out for kingfishers here.

The path gradually moves away from the river across the water meadow, marker posts identifying the route, heading for the trees on slightly higher ground, and the line of wires and posts.



Once across the meadow turn right to follow the line of the wire fence, eventually going through a kissing gate in the tall hedge.

Keep on the path with allotments to the right. At the road (Burydell Lane) turn right, cross the river again and walk to the main road in Park Street.



You pass another former mill which produced flour until 1921. It was then used to grind animal bones for glue, creating a terrible smell.

You are now in Park Street village alongside the old Roman Watling Street, now the A5183.

To finish the walk here, turn right to reach Park Street station about ¼ mile along the road. Or you can cross the road, turn left and then right into Park Street Lane and follow this road for just over ½ mile to reach How Wood station.

There were once extensive watercress beds on the edge of Park Street. The Abbey line carried the cress to the London market, hence its old nickname of ‘the watercress line’.

To continue the walk to Bricket Wood station (another 4 miles from here), cross the main road, turn left and walk alongside the road to the river bridge, then turn right to continue downstream on the River Ver Trail.

The path is on the right bank.

The route runs through an area which was heavily altered by sand and gravel extraction during the 1950s. Flooded pits (managed as fishing lakes) are surrounded by wet woodland.



Follow the Trail waymarks, shortly emerging onto a surfaced path. Turn left and keep on the main surfaced path, keeping right at this point in the photo at right.



Eventually the path crosses the river again and goes through a small car park.

Go up the steps and through the kissing gate on the far side of the car park. You are now in an area of restored gravel workings which are gradually being colonised by plants like teasel.



Keep straight towards the M25 in the distance.

Close to the M25 turn right at the metal hoarding to follow the signs under the motorway.

As you emerge from under the motorway Moor Mill comes into view, a striking contrast between new and old. The present mill buildings date from 1700, although there has been a mill here for much longer, possibly since Saxon times.

The mill is now a restaurant. Keeping the mill buildings to the right head along Moor Mill Lane to the junction with Smug Oak Lane.



Turn right to cross the bridge over the river, then immediately after the bridge turn left onto the bridleway which crosses a small triangle of land and a drive.

Walk between the low posts and stay on the bridleway.

Continue alongside the car park.



Beyond the car park the bridleway joins the Riverside Way, owned by Hertfordshire County Council, which is a surfaced route running alongside the river for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. This is a good place to look for species associated with rivers including damselflies, kingfishers, brown trout and the white flowers of water crowfoot which float on the water's surface in summer.

Continue along the Riverside Way.



Eventually you will reach a bridge. Cross this and at the lane ahead (Drop Lane) turn left.

Continue along Drop Lane and in a short distance where the lane bends sharply to the right, turn left onto the public footpath which follows the river, with riverside vegetation to your left and a field on the right.



Very soon you will reach the confluence of the Ver with the River Colne. The Ver flows into the Colne from the left in this view. The Colne is one of Hertfordshire's principal rivers. Its main source is in North Mymms Park and many places along its course include 'Colney' in their names.

The Ver appears to be the larger of the two rivers but the watercourse continues as the Colne. The River Ver Trail ends here.



To continue the walk, cross the footbridge just beyond the confluence and diagonally cross the field ahead following the trodden path to the gap in the hedge on the far side.

Turn right onto the green lane which may be muddy.



When you get to the public footpath on the track leading to Little Munden Equestrian Livery Yard, walk towards the yard.

Just before the buildings you will cross the Colne again. Go past the first building, then turn right to walk between the buildings.



At the end of the buildings, take the public footpath to the left along the track which bends to the left and climbs the short hill.

The track continues between fences and eventually meets a gated road just to the left of a house and garden.



Turn right onto a short stretch of the road to a crossroads. Go ahead past the low posts to reach Bricket Wood Common.

For a short distance you will now be on the Hertfordshire Way, heading in the clockwise direction as indicated by the roundel. The 173 acre common is a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), valued for its expanse of now rare lowland heath. Other habitats include ponds and ancient bluebell woodland, and the whole area is rich in wildlife.



The common is of geological interest too. The ice sheet which around 450,000 years ago extended into what is now Hertfordshire reached as far as here, the south-western limit of any ice advance in the county. The ice left behind deposits of sticky boulder clay and soils here are infertile and poorly-drained, not ideal for ploughing. Instead the area was grazing land 'in common' for animals from the nearby hamlets of Smug Oak and Old Bricket Wood and supplied fuel wood and building timber. A small herd of cattle still grazes here as part of the management of the common for conservation.

Keep going straight ahead to pass through a gate.

A short distance further on turn right at the waymark post and take Footpath 59 through the woodland; in places there are boardwalks over wet ground.



When you get to the ramp up to a boardwalk crossing the path, turn left.

Follow the footpath over the bridge crossing the railway line.



At the far side of the bridge turn right at the crossing of paths onto the public bridleway, marked by blue arrows.

Continue through the wood on this route.

In approximately one third of a mile the bridleway reaches the edge of the wood. The last section runs alongside old hornbeam and other trees.



When you reach the road by the railway bridge, cross the road onto the pavement opposite, looking and listening for approaching traffic. Turn right to go under the bridge and follow the path.

The route then runs along the pavement beside the road. Continue for approximately one third of a mile to reach Bricket Wood station.



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This route last walked by CPRE in April 2025.

If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and promote the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone. For more information on our work, or to sign up for our newsletter, make a donation, or volunteer with us, please visit www.cpreherts.org.uk

CPRE Hertfordshire is a registered charity no. 1162419, address: 31a Church Street, Welwyn, AL6 9LW, tel 01438 717587.

Note: all walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended.